

OXFORD UNIVERSITY HISTORY APTITUDE TEST

2016

QUESTION THREE (40 marks)

*This source is an edited extract consisting of a series of numbered articles. It is from a longer constitutional document, called the **Code Noir**, which was issued by the King of France in the late seventeenth century. The **Code Noir** referred to France's overseas colonies in the Caribbean. Candidates do not need to know anything about French imperial history in the 17th century, and must not draw on any outside knowledge that they may have.*

I. All the slaves who will be in our islands will be baptised and instructed in the Catholic religion. Those who will buy newly arrived slaves must inform the Governor of the said islands within a week or face a discretionary fine. Our officials will give the necessary orders to have them instructed and baptised.

II. We forbid any public exercise of any religion other than the Catholic faith; we wish that offenders be punished as rebels against the French state. We prohibit all secret religious meetings, which we declare treason, and masters who allow or tolerate such meetings among their slaves will be subject to the same penalties.

III. We charge all of our subjects, whatever their status, to observe Sundays and holidays that are kept by our Catholic religion. We forbid them to work or to make their slaves work on these days, from the hour of midnight until the other midnight. The penalty will be the confiscation of both all sugar produced and of the slaves who were made to work illegally, as well as discretionary further punishment for the masters.

IV. We forbid priests to officiate at the marriages of slaves unless they can show the consent of their masters. We also forbid masters to force slaves to marry against their will.

V. We forbid slaves belonging to different masters to gather, whether claiming for a wedding or otherwise, on pain of the whip and the branding, and repeated offences can be punished with death. This we leave to the decision of our judges.

VI. Masters who are convicted of having permitted or tolerated such assemblies will pay for all the damage that may have been done. A fine for the first offence will be doubled for repeat offences.

VII. We forbid slaves to sell sugar cane for whatever reason, even with the permission of their master, on pain of whipping for the slaves and a fine for the master. We also forbid slaves to sell any kind of commodity, even food and firewood, without the express permission of their masters proven through possession of a ticket, on pain of confiscation of the goods and profits to the loss of the master.

VIII. We wish, to this end, that two persons be charged by our officers in each market to examine the commodities that will be carried by the slaves, together with the tickets of their masters.

IX. Each week masters will have to furnish their slaves with a good supply of vegetables, as well as salted beef and fish in proportion. We forbid them from giving to the slaves cane brandy in the place of essential subsistence. They must also provide them with adequate cloth and canvas.

X. The slaves who are not fed and clothed by their masters in the manner ordered here will notify our attorney and give to him their statements. The masters will, if the information also comes from elsewhere, be prosecuted, which is essential to make restitution for the barbarous and inhumane treatments of masters toward their slaves.

XI. The slave who has struck his master or the wife of his master, his mistress or their children to bring blood to the face, will be punished with death.

XII. Masters will be permitted to manumit¹ their slaves, without being required to provide any reason.

XIII. Slaves who are made universal beneficiaries in the wills of their masters, or named executors of their wills, or tutors of their children, will be deemed manumitted.

XIV. We command manumitted slaves to retain a particular respect for their former masters; such that any offence they commit against them will be punished more severely than if it had been done against another person. We declare them, however, free of any other burdens or services that their former masters would like to claim, either on their persons or on any possessions that they may hold.

XV. We grant to manumitted slaves the same rights, privileges and liberties enjoyed by persons born free; desiring that they merit this acquired liberty and that these laws produce in them the same effects that the good fortune of natural liberty causes in our other subjects.

What does this extract from the *Code Noir* tell us about the relationship between slaves and masters?

¹ Manumission is the term for the legal freeing of slaves.